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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY REPORT - AUGUST 11, 2006

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1. The following are brief items of interest compiled by
Embassy Minsk.

International Relations

2. Lukashenko Pushes for Stronger UN Role

On August 1, President Lukashenko asserted that Belarus seeks to strengthen the role of the United Nations on the grounds that "the United Nations belongs to all countries, not only to the Americans." He emphasized that his view is shared by an overwhelming majority of African, Latin American and Asian countries and noted that Belarus has recently intensified cooperation with these countries. Lukashenko added, "We entered the level of strategic partnership with China last year. This is worth a lot."

Local Elections

3. Opposition Party to Field 100 Candidates in Local elections

On August 2, Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Gramada" (BSDP) Deputy Chairman Vladimir Nistyuk reported to independent media that his party plans to field some 100 candidates and will focus on social issues in local elections tentatively scheduled for January. He explained, "unlike presidential or parliamentary votes, parliamentary elections are not a competition among party ideologies and platforms but rather a fight for votes from specific people living in a specific election district." According to Nistyuk, BSDP is considering cooperation with other opposition parties. He noted that the Brest regional BSDP party had signed cooperation agreements with the local chapters of the pro-democratic Belarusian Party of Communists and the United Civic Party (UCP) and that a similar accord was reached between BSDP and UCP chapters in Grodno.

4. Opposition Communist Party Ordered to Present Membership List

On August 1, Belarus' Justice Ministry ordered the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) to surrender data regarding the membership of its chapters, including the names of all members. According to BPC Central Committee Secretary Valery Ukhnaiev, the leadership of the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus (CPB) urged the ministry to check the BPC membership. Ukhnaiev maintained that the order violated Belarus' Political Parties Law, which requires parties to present members' lists to authorities only during founding conventions. Last month, the CPB proclaimed a merger with the BPC and persuaded the GOB to re-register BPC

grassroots organizations as CPB chapters (reftel). Ukhnaiev noted, "The authorities failed to split the party through the merger conference. Now they are going to resort to their usual practice and try to liquidate the BPC through court."

Civil Society

15. Lukashenko State Security Council to Set Radio Frequencies

On July 31, President Lukashenko signed a decree creating a State Commission for Radio Frequencies overseen by the State Security Council (SSC). The new commission is to be headed by SSC Deputy Chairman Yuri Kryvasheyev. Previously, a committee under the Ministry of Communication and Information assigned radio frequencies. In effect, the decree gives Lukashenko more direct control over radio frequencies.

16. Police Return 85,000 Seized Copies of Opposition Newspaper

On August 2, Minsk police department finally returned more than 85,600 copies of the pro-Communist party's newspaper "Tovarishch" that police seized two days before the March 19 presidential elections. In April, the district police department informed the editors of Tovarishch that the newspapers were not illegal and requested them to recover the newspapers. However, the newspaper staff insisted that police return the two tons of paper at the GOB's expense.

17. Pro-Government Youth Union Leader Resigns

On August 1, Mikhail Orda resigned as the leader of the pro-government Belarusian National Youth Union (BNYU). Orda did not offer an explanation for his resignation. The pro-government youth leader had headed BNYU since March 2003. Orda's replacement is BNYU deputy head Leonid Kovalyov. During the 2000 parliamentary

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elections, Orda won a seat in the lower chamber of Belarus' National Assembly. He remains the Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee on State System Building, Local Self-government and Rules of Procedure. Following the presidential elections, the EU included Orda on a list of Belarusian officials barred from receiving EU visas because of their involvement in election fraud and voter intimidation.

Society

18. Gomel Beaches Closed after Testing Positive for Bacteria

Authorities in the southeastern city of Gomel ordered all major beaches closed after tests indicated high levels of intestinal bacteria. Water samples from the Sozh River showed a high count of a type of bacteria commonly found in fecal matter. Ingesting such bacteria can cause stomach illness. According to authorities, high water temperatures and litter caused the water bacteria populations to soar. The beaches will reopen only after a directive by the city's chief sanitary expert.

19. UN Reports 30 Percent Rise in Sickness among Belarusian Teenagers

On August 1, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) reported that the incidence of diseases among Belarusian teenagers rose by 30.9 percent in the last 10 years. Circulatory diseases skyrocketed by 114 percent while bone and muscle ailments spiked by 83.6 percent. The number of teenagers diagnosed with cancer rose by 74 percent. Teenage diabetes cases grew by 23.7 percent and mental disorders by 40 percent. UNFPA observed a four-fold rise in alcohol and drug use among people between 15 and 24 years of age over the past five years. The organization also noted that the sickness rate was higher among girls. According to UNFPA, the sharp rise in the teenage sickness rate has adversely affected

Belarusian demography. Belarus' population shrank by 49,900 in 2005.

Economy

10. Agriculture Ministry Reports 1.8 Million Tons of Grain Gathered in Belarus

According to the Belarusian Agriculture Ministry, as much as 1.796 million tons of grain was gathered in Belarus as of August 2, almost 550,000 tons more than in 2005. The ministry reported that 502,570 tons were gathered in the Minsk region, 420,670 in the Grodno region, 418,250 tons in the Brest region, 245,850 tons in the Gomel region, 125,360 tons in the Mogilyov region and 83,450 tons in the Vitebsk region. However, the average grain yield per hectare dropped 296 kilograms to 2,943 kilograms from 2005. The ministry projects that grain harvesters will collect between 6.7 and 7.2 million tons of grain by September 1, a ten percent increase from grain collection last year.

11. Belavia to Offer E-tickets This year

Belarus' national airline Belavia signed an agreement with the U.S. company Sabre Airline Solutions corporation to begin electronic ticketing on December 1, 2006. Sabre offers a service called "SabreSonic Ticket" that allows airlines access to reduce costs of e-ticket distribution and database maintenance. Moreover, Belavia will establish a link to SabreSonic's universal electronic ticket hub that connects carriers and their partner airlines. The paperless ticket technology will likely require an upgrade of Belavia's website to allow the sale of tickets via the Internet and a frequent flier program. Sabre's reservations system is used by more than 100 airlines across the world. Some 50 airlines have access to the SabreSonic e-ticket system.

Quote of the Week

12. While meeting with Belarusian heads of mission abroad on August 1, President Lukashenko offered the following guidance regarding Western criticism of GOB policies:

"You know, sometimes when we get some nasty article, which was probably paid by our evil-wishers in The Washington Post or some other similar paper, we start discussing this in our country. This does not benefit our relationship with the United States. We should not pay attention to some trifles because it really irritates the US Embassy. We should be more responsible and more far-seeing. Once again, I underline this: if we ever have to criticize, we should do this in a civilized manner and based on facts."

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